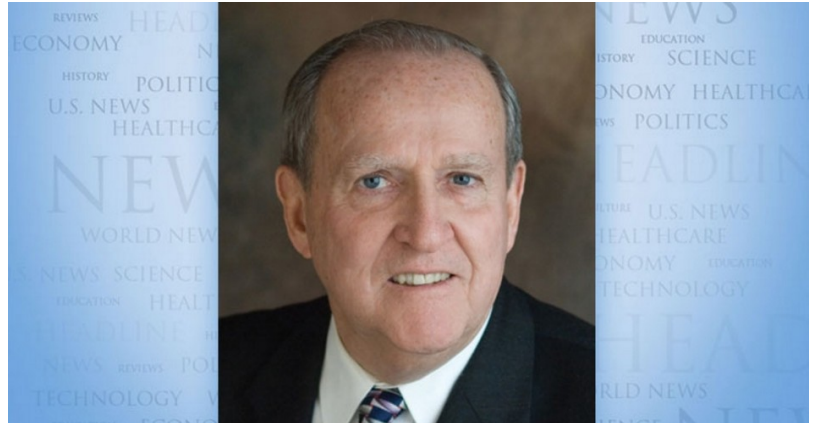




Written by [John F. McManus](#) on September 13, 2019

## Mugabe's Legacy: Ruination of a Once Prosperous and Peaceful Land

Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe died at age 95 in Singapore on September 6. His blood-drenched grasping for ultimate power in the prosperous former British colony of Rhodesia saw him achieve dictatorial one-man rule in 1980. Once in power, this Chinese Communist-backed black African presided over ruination of a country that had once been the envy of blacks throughout the continent.



Formerly known as Southern Rhodesia (Zambia being the former Northern Rhodesia), the land-locked territory declared independence from Great Britain in November 1965. U.S. response to the anti-Communist, pro-Western, white-run government of Prime Minister Ian Smith included a refusal of diplomatic recognition, economic sanctions, and heavy pressure to cede power to one-man, one-vote majority rule. During this same period, the U.S. response to the transformation of other former European provinces in Africa into despotism customarily included full diplomatic recognition, economic aid, and an ever-present welcome mat in Washington for their newly empowered Marxist leaders.

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By 1978, the effect of U.S. and United Nations campaigns against peaceful Rhodesia forced Prime Minister Smith to capitulate. The Henry Kissinger-led campaign against "white rule" had triumphed and jockeying for power commenced immediately among grasping revolutionaries. Out of the pack emerged Soviet-backed Joshua Nkomo and Communist Chinese/North Korea-backed Robert Mugabe. Each had built a military headquarters in a neighboring country — Nkomo established ZAPU in Zambia and Mugabe built his ZANU base in Mozambique. Each eager despot launched terrorist forays into the homeland they coveted. The two also wanted it to be known as Zimbabwe.

Blood-soaked revolutionary campaigns led by these "liberators" cost at least 45,000 lives, more than half of them blacks who either refused to back one of the murdering revolutionaries or simply got in the way of terrorist attacks. Mugabe eventually consolidated power over the 8.4 million residents, becoming "prime minister" in 1980 and "president" seven years later. By 1981, only 250,000 whites remained). Nkomo ended up in one of Mugabe's jails. White flight continued and many farmlands previously known for great productivity became wastelands.

After a decade of Mugabe rule, with his promises to blacks unfulfilled, and outright confiscation of white-owned property looming, a revision of the nation's constitution became inevitable. Always referring to himself as a Marxist-Leninist, Mugabe tightened the screws on freedom as socialists have always done. Yet he and the government bureaucrats he appointed resided in confiscated mansions, drove Mercedes-Benz autos, and always had wallets stuffed with U.S. dollars. His promises to compensate white farmers whose land he had seized never materialized. And white flight continued as the only alternative for those whose ancestors had transformed a land of want and privation into an island of prosperity and freedom. By 2002, only 600 white farmers out of a total of 4,500 still remained.



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Mugabe-style rule also led to wild inflation. In 2010, it was so horrific that a government printed note (famously dubbed Zimbabwe dollars) claimed a worth of 100 trillion Z-dollars but it couldn't buy a loaf of bread. The U.S. dollar actually became the nation's only reliable currency. Bundles of Zimbabwe paper notes ended up in the hands of children who made up games to play them with because even they knew they had worthless currency. Then in 2015, Chinese President Xi showed up and promised billions for energy projects. Mugabe responded by announcing that Zimbabwe would now consider the Chinese yuan as an official currency, a breakthrough in Africa for China's Xi.

In 2017, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who had been first vice president under Mugabe and a Mugabe ally, came to power in a coup d'état, resulting in Mugabe's official "resignation."

While Rhodesia died several decades ago, Zimbabwe's future won't be marked by an early death. Its only future, as long as socialism continues to reign, will be a slow death, the legacy left by Robert Mugabe who presided over the ruination of a once-prosperous and peaceful land.

John F. McManus is president emeritus of [The John Birch Society](#).



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